

VZCZCXRO7778
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1113/01 1001908
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 091908Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6774
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001113

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/09/2023

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: ISCI'S AMAR AL-HAKIM ON POST-BASRAH UNITY, JAM,
AND IRAN

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1065 (MALIKI SCORES BIG)

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 664 (AMAR-AL HAKIM MEETING)

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an April 8 meeting, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) heir apparent Amar al-Hakim told us the recent GOI crackdown in Basrah was an important step in affirming Iraq's identity as a nation based on the rule of law and institutions rather than a country ruled by outlaw gangs. He said he has had "frank" discussions with top leaders about translating security gains into political progress, and responding to growing public support through better delivery of services. The black-turbaned Amar asserted that ISCI and the GOI were taking a new view of short-term integration of Shia tribesmen to assist the GOI in maintaining security in south-central Iraq. If the Jaysh al-Mehdi (JAM) is disbanded and its members pledge loyalty to the state, he continued, some can be integrated into the Iraqi army and police in the same manner as members of Badr and the Peshmerga. Regarding ISCI-Sadrism relations, Amar said "all we see from them is anger" and he attributed poor relations to a lack of a common ideology among Sadrists ("the Trend in reality is a mixture of contradictory trends") and little political experience among Trend leaders. Amar encouraged resumption of USG-Iran dialogue, stating that it would serve the interests of both sides as well as enhancing Iraq's stability. End Summary.

New Momentum for Political Progress

[1](#)2. (C) Meeting at ISCI's headquarters outside the International Zone, Amar told NSC Senior Director McGurk that the recent GOI security crackdown in Basrah signaled that Iraq is affirming its identity as a nation based on the rule of law and institutions rather than a country ruled by criminals and outlaw gangs "even though a heavy price must be paid for this." Amar said Iraq's public and political leaders had rallied around Prime Minister in this effort, and the Political Committee for National Security had produced a strong and supportive April 5 statement (Ref A), and he said he had "frank" talks with Maliki, Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi and others on ways to build on this new-found spirit of unity. In order to translate recent security gains into political progress, Amar continued, the GOI must improve its delivery of public services and invest in job-creating rebuilding projects. This in turn will enhance Iraq's image in the region and encourage reluctant neighboring states to engage more with Iraq. McGurk commended the GOI for standing up to criminals and beginning to use its various state resources, noting the progress it has achieved over the past year. He said the USG will continue to press Iraq's Arab neighbors to engage more, noting the importance that PM Maliki participate in the upcoming Neighbors meeting in Kuwait to make Iraq's case directly to other leaders. Amar replied that better relations with all of Iraq's neighbors

will contribute to greater balance and stability in the region.

13. (C) Repeating complaints aired last month to the Ambassador and repeated recently by Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi (Ref B), Amar griped about alleged inaccurate reporting by USG-funded al-Hurra network. While last month's complaint was based on alleged anti-ISCI reporting, Amar and Adel claimed al-Hurra covered the GOI's Basrah operation with a distinctly pro-JAM slant. Amar said Iraqis are aware that al-Hurra receives USG support and are confused why the network disseminates such reporting. Acknowledging Amar's complaints about al-Hurra, McGurk said we take such concerns very seriously: while the USG has no control over al-Hurra content, we do have an interest in accurate journalism and we will look further into the matter.

Militias and Tribal Engagement

14. (C) McGurk asked for Amar's response to characterizations of the GOI crackdown in Basra as a battle between Shia militias. Amar stated that ISCI/Badr, along with the Peshmerga and other political movements that once had affiliated armed groups, agreed to be named and integrated through a legal process under CPA Order 91 - pledging loyalty to the state of Iraq. Some Badr individuals joined GOI security forces and others joined the GOI civil service as individuals, according to their qualifications, a process that took years and was coordinated with Coalition Forces. The GOI is now pursuing similar integration of some qualified Sunni "Awakening" members. If the JAM will dissolve itself and follow the same procedures, Amar continued, some of its personnel can be similarly absorbed as long as they are

BAGHDAD 00001113 002 OF 003

qualified and pledge loyalty to the state, the pre-requisites for entering the GOI security forces. McGurk emphasized the need to show that the GOI is taking action against criminals acting contrary to the laws of Iraq - regardless of affiliation.

15. (C) Noting that ISCI and the GOI appear to have a new view regarding engagement with south-central Shia tribes to buttress GOI security efforts, Amar stated that, unlike the situation with tribes in Anbar and Western Iraq, south-central tribes have always supported the GOI and participated in the political process. Over the past few years, these tribes had worked with the GOI to prevent armed groups (read JAM) from establishing hegemony in south-central Iraq. Amar said he stated frankly to Maliki that men from these tribes can help replace the "thousands" of GOI security personnel who deserted during the recent security crackdown in Basrah and elsewhere, as the tribes are loyal to the GOI and wish to preserve security in their home areas. Amar suggested that the tribesmen can be brought on to assist on a short-term contractual basis (six months or one year), but the GOI should also invest in public works projects in their areas to provide vocational training and jobs. Amar stated that the key to GOI engagement with south-central tribes is a long-term GOI commitment to follow-through on its projects and programs. He said that recent experience in Basrah showed that once people see the GOI is determined to take on JAM and will not abandon the effort after a brief period, common people will quickly rally to the GOI side. As an example, he told of a group of tribal sheikhs from Amarah in Maysan province (a JAM stronghold) who were so emboldened by the Basrah operation that they openly pledged support for the GOI: when they realized the GOI was not following-up on the Basrah operation by coming to Amarah, they were obliged to beg forgiveness from JAM commanders in their areas.

Sadrists and Iran

16. (C) When asked about relations between ISCI and the

Sadrism Trend, particularly in light of the October 2007 mutual non-aggression pact inked by Amar's father, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, and Muqtada al-Sadr, Amar replied that ISCI has tried hard over the years to have good relations with the Sadrist by "opening the door to dialogue with Trend moderates" and by exercising great patience and restraint when dealing with Sadrists, even when "hundreds" of ISCI/Badr offices were attacked and officials killed. Still, he said, "all we see from them is anger and they blame us for any attacks by the Coalition or the GOI." Amar attributed this anger to lack of a common ideology among Sadrists ("the Trend in reality is a mixture of contradictory trends") and little political experience among Trend leaders. Furthermore, moderate elements have little influence and Muqtada feels threatened by anyone in his movement who appears intelligent and capable, and thus keeps shuffling his senior advisors.

17. (C) In response to a question about a strategy the GOI should pursue in dealing with criminal elements within the Sadrist movement in Sadr City, Amar said it was important to realize that "at least 70 percent" of Sadr City residents follow Sistani and not Muqtada, but they are intimidated on a daily basis by a relatively small number of criminals. Amar said any approach must concentrate on four points: one, display no tolerance for any violation of law or carrying of arms against the GOI; two, reach out to moderates within the Trend with a message that the GOI is not targeting the political movement, only criminals who bear weapons against the state; three, coordinate all operations closely with the Coalition; and four, pressure Iran to stop providing support to outlaw gangs.

18. (C) On this last point, Amar encouraged resumption of USG-Iran dialogue, stating that it would serve the interests of both sides as well as enhance Iraq's stability. While Iraqis may not like having Iran as a neighbor ("if we could change the map of the world we would put a great ocean between ourselves and Iran," Amar stated with a playful smile), "our destiny is to be neighbors and share a 1400 km border." He said the Iranians complain that the USG has not acknowledged the helpful measures Iran claims to have taken in recent months such as pressuring Muqtada to establish and then extend the JAM freeze, and to pressure armed groups to stop rocket attacks against the International Zone: instead of responding to "clear signals of interest in dialogue," the Iranians complain that the USG continues to accuse Iran of wrongdoing and has made problems for Iran at the UN Security Council. McGurk replied that we now see that the JAM freeze period was used for re-supply of rockets and advanced training in their use. While the USG is prepared to resume trilateral talks, we must see that Iran's actions match its words. Amar closed the meeting by affirming ISCI's desire

BAGHDAD 00001113 003 OF 003

for close relations with the USG, asking that the two sides deal with one another with complete transparency so that each is always aware of the other's perspectives.
BUTENIS